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## Briefing Note:

# Review of 2026 Hurstpierpoint Orchard Wassail

For Community Engagement Committee 12<sup>th</sup> February 2026

The 2026 Orchard Wassail was held on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> January, comprising of a workshop at the Village Centre between 1pm-3pm, attended by approximately 60 people, followed by the main evening event attended by around 200-250 (including the performers). The evening event started at the Millennium Garden before processing down St Georges' Lane, into Hurst Meadows and on to the Heritage Orchard. This year, our offer to fund a workshop at St Lawrence School was also accepted, and this took place for the year 5 children on Friday 9<sup>th</sup> January. Several of these children and their families also attended the wassail.

### Positives

- A full event management plan was written for this year's event, incorporating an updated risk assessment. This set clear roles and responsibilities for all involved and provides a framework for future events
- Footpath improvements to the Meadows meant that, despite the considerable amount of wet weather running up to the event, ground conditions were very good
- Partnership working with Hurst Rethink was extremely successful. They assisted with event planning, obtained funding for the lighting and provided and coordinated all the volunteers, both for serving refreshments at the workshop and for stewarding the main event
- The route was well stewarded and lit, no injuries were reported and there was no litter found at the orchard the following morning
- A large proportion of the non-performers at the event this year were residents of Hurstpierpoint or neighbouring villages
- The event attracted a demographic which does not usually engage with Parish Council activities
- Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with various videos and photographs posted on social media, including by a lifestyle magazine/content creator "Sussex Exclusive" providing good publicity for the village/parish council and increased social media engagement
- Increased footfall on the High Street before and after the event

### Concerns

- **Size:** The event has almost doubled in attendance year on year. Numbers were estimated at between 200-250 people, although not all did stay for the full event. Consideration to be given to ways of managing numbers and keeping the event primarily for residents
- **Stewards:** We rely entirely on volunteer stewards, arranged and managed by Hurst Rethink. This does create risk as, without appropriate stewarding, the event would not be manageable
- **Cost:** This is by far the most expensive event that the Parish Council runs, rising considerably this year due to the school workshop and the band expenses
- **Fruit in the Millennium Garden:** Some comments were made about the volume of rotting fruit underneath the trees. Suggestions included some sort of community harvest day or promoting that the fruit is available for the community. This will be discussed at the Hurst Meadows working group.